

## IDAHO POPULATION SHIFTS TO URBAN CENTERS

Although Idaho suffered its worst downturn in two decades in 2002, the economy remained positive even if just barely. But while avoiding the recession that gripped much of the nation, that economic disruption appears to have accelerated what has been an inexorable migration of people from rural communities to the state's urban centers.

They have followed the jobs that are concentrating in the cities and dragged some other jobs with them as they moved.

New estimates by the Census Bureau show that from 2000 to mid-2003, 20 of Idaho's 44 counties saw more people move out than move in during the economic upheaval. But even as the economy was improving from mid-2003 through last July, 13 of those 20 counties reported even more out-migration. In 10 of those counties—all of them rural—natural population growth (births over deaths) was not enough to avoid an actual population decline from 2000 to mid-2004.

FYI Table 1: Idaho Counties with Net Out-migration for '00-'03 and '03-'04.

County	Population 7-1- 2000	Population 7-1-2004	Migration '00-'04	% Job Change '00-'04
Bear Lake	6,425	6,323	-213	0.82
Benewah	9,195	8,961	-237	9.98
Butte	2,899	2,838	-108	-14.97
Caribou	7,309	7,213	-224	0.03
Cassia	21,412	21,393	-871	-2.05
Clark	1,027	906	-144	-6.51
Clearwater	8,895	8,393	-445	7.81
Elmore	29,088	28,878	-1,743	3.72
Minidoka	20,097	19,229	-1,558	-6.60
Shoshone	13,747	12,827	-757	-3.49
State	1,299,677	1,393,262	52,969	6.26
U.S. Census Bureau				

Five of those 10 counties experienced total employment decline over the period while three of the other five experienced job growth below the statewide average.

As Idaho navigated the national recession during those four years, its economy managed to put nearly 39,500 more people to work. But rather than being evenly spread across the state, that prosperity followed the population growth – or caused it.

Nearly 24,000 of new workers were in the state's three burgeoning urban centers—Ada and Canyon counties, Kootenai County and Bonneville County. Combined with their population growth—eight of every 10 people who moved during the first four years of the decade settled there—those four counties were home to over half of all Idahoans and provided more than 51 percent of the states jobs.

FYI Table 2: Population & Jobs Growth 2000-2004 for Idaho's Five Counties with Urban Centers

County	Population July 2004	Change from 2000	Total Jobs July 2004	Change from 2000
Idaho	1,393,262	99,306	669,717	39,465
Ada	332,523	31,619	171,934	5,213
Canyon	158,038	26,597	69,826	6,005
Kootenai	122,350	13,665	58,336	8,020
Bonneville	89,653	7,131	42,882	4,452

Just four years earlier, those counties had 48 percent of the population.

Already established as a commercial and financial center, Ada County has continued as a magnet for business expansion and new enterprises. That growth has been spilling into adjacent Canyon County for several years as businesses took advantage of cheaper land values while maintaining proximity to the capital city. The transformation of neighboring Gem and Boise counties from independent economies to bedroom communities has helped maintain their growth.

Ada and Canyon counties alone claimed over half the population growth, not only from mid-2003 to mid-2004, but for the entire four-year period. Their combined population at more than 490,500 made up 35.2 percent of the state total, nearly two full percentage points higher than in April 2000.

"While many Canyon County residents spend a great deal of their time from 8 to 5, Monday

through Friday, in Boise, they spend their evenings and weekends in Canyon County,” said Carmela Ramirez, the Idaho Commerce & Labor local office manager in Caldwell.

“We are becoming not only a bedroom community, but a recreation community,” Ramirez said. “Entrepreneurial opportunities are endless for those with a daring spirit who are willing to provide entertainment options to all the workers living in Canyon County.”

The Bureau of Labor Statistics underscored that growth in a new report that found the number of businesses in Ada County grew nearly 4 percent from September 2003 to last September, ranking the county 25th in growth among nation’s 318 largest counties.

Kootenai County, and to a lesser extent Bonner County, has combined its scenic beauty with aggressive economic development to become the state’s northern growth center. Regional Economist Kathryn Tacke sees the surge in manufacturing and call center operations playing a major role while the overall growth has kept the construction sector strong in Kootenai County, which led the state in population gain from mid-2003 to mid-2004 at 4 percent. Sixteen percent more people were working last summer than in mid-2000 before the downturn.

Idaho Falls and surrounding Bonneville County have focused for the past several years on diversifying economic activity, and it is paying off. Employment was up nearly 12 percent since 2000 and the population grew nearly 3 percent from mid-2003 through last June. Regional Economist Tanya Alban has watched leaders cash in on the community’s status as a retail and medical hub for up to 100 miles around.

During the same four years, the 25 counties that struggled the most in terms of job retention and creation saw a drop in their share of both the available work and the people relying on it. A number of those counties boasted unemployment rates below the statewide average during spring 2004, but in all likelihood the cause was the exodus of workers to other communities with jobs demanding their skills.

“Being able to supply a trained, quality workforce is critical,” said Carol Campbell at the Labor & Commerce field office in Payette.

Downsizing by one employer and the closure of the Amalgamated Sugar Co. processing plant in Nyssa, Ore., freed up skilled workers for other businesses in the region, but Teresa Ballard at the Payette office said work training programs already available locally have waiting lists and the office has been encouraging various providers to offer more.

From 2000 to mid-2004, Payette and the other 24 primarily rural counties combined for a net increase of just 155 jobs. Sixteen of those counties reported a total of 1,777 more people working by mid-2004 while the other nine had 1,622 fewer people on the job. Their share of Idaho’s employment last July was less than 19 percent, down from over 20 percent four years earlier.

It is a shift that began in 1999 after half a decade of growth in every corner of the state.

During the near-depression of the early and mid-1980s, every county but the state’s largest, Ada, recorded a decline in population during at least one year. Mills and mines were closing and farm consolidation was on the rise. The state’s only bank failure in the last half century occurred in 1986 in Malad. The statewide population dropped nearly 10,000 in 1986 and 1987 combined. Thirty-four of the 44 counties lost population in 1986, and seven others were pulled into the decline in 1987.

Capitalizing on its quality of life, Idaho began diversifying its economy beyond its historic natural resource base as the recovery began in mid-1987. But it took another seven years before the flight from rural Idaho slowed to a trickle.

During the mid-1990s, growth was spread throughout the state. Even Shoshone County in the Panhandle experienced five straight years of population growth after struggling for more than a decade to overcome the loss of the Bunker Hill complex and the decline of its deep mines.

Idaho became one of the nation’s most rapidly expanding states, in large part because of the significant role high-technology industries, led by Micron Technology Inc., were playing.

But by the close of the 1990s, high-tech activity was essentially the only significant bright spot in Idaho, and it was increasingly concentrated in the southwestern part of the state. In 1999, Shoshone and Caribou counties, among the most challenged

in diversifying their natural resource-based economies, were the first to post new declines in population. The next January, economist John Church told state policy-makers that seven of every 10 new jobs were being created within a 50-mile radius of the state Capitol. A year later, Church said simply that Idaho outside its urban centers was suffering.

In 2001, 16 primarily rural counties recorded population losses even as the statewide population was growing faster than in all but seven other states. The number of counties experiencing a new round of rural flight has remained in double digits since.

Owyhee County was among them, and it takes a toll on small communities like Homedale and Marsing.

“Seasonal and migrant farm workers are beginning to seek employment in other areas such as production, fabrication and warehousing,” Ramirez said. “There’s been an increase in automation in agriculture, and that’s not only impacted our migrant farm worker population, but our youth as well. Students looked to those types of jobs for summer employment.”

While nearly all the counties struggling to maintain both an employment and a population base are rural, the glaring exceptions have been Bannock and Nez Perce counties.

While employment in Bannock County rose just over 1,000 during the period, that was less than half the growth rate statewide, and county population growth was minimal. Over 3,200 more people moved out of the county than moved in. That flight was averaging more than 850 a year until after the downturn. It slowed to just over 600 from July 2003 through June 2004. Bannock County would have suffered an actual decline in population had it not been for births running more than 3,300 higher than deaths.

Regional Labor Economist Shelley Allen suspects that the expansion of Ricks College in Rexburg into a

full-scale university—Brigham Young University-Idaho—has reduced the influx of students from Rexburg finishing their college degrees at Idaho State University in Pocatello. In addition, many Idaho State students completing work in the health sciences, the school’s specialty, typically leave the area and the state for employment, lifestyle or other reasons.

But there have also been some significant economic displacement from 2000 to mid-2004. Union Pacific Railroad eliminated about 200 jobs, FMC Corp. shut down its elemental phosphorus operation, the Idaho National Laboratory continued downsizing and J.R. Simplot Co. closed its regional headquarters in Pocatello and its ammonia processing facility.

Despite a highly educated labor pool because of a college in Lewiston and two universities within 50 miles, Nez Perce County’s population and employment have been essentially stagnant since 2000. Population was up only 1.2 percent in the four-year period and the number of people on the job was down fractionally.

Regional Economist Doug Tweedy said that despite some improvement, U.S. Highway 95 still fails to meet the transportation demands of prospective new businesses and others have been discouraged by the lack of available operating space. While several businesses have expressed interest in the area, Tweedy said they do not want to wait a year or more to build facilities.

*For a complete view of the population estimates and changes by county, please see FYI Table 3 on page 27.*

---

Bob Fick, Communications Manager  
317 W. Main Street, Boise , ID 83735  
(208) 332-3570, ext. 3628  
E-mail: bob.fick@cl.idaho.gov

FYI Table 3: Population Estimates, Changes by County—2000, 2003, 2004

County	Population Estimates			Change '03 to '04		Net Migration '03-'04	Change '00-'04		Employment '04	
	7/1/2004	7/1/2003	7/1/2000	Number	Percent		Number	Percent	Number	% Change from '00
Idaho	1,393,262	1,367,034	1,299,677	26,228	1.9	15,436	93,585	7.20	669,717	6.30
Ada	332,523	325,482	303,059	7,041	2.2	3,886	29,464	9.70	171,934	3.10
Adams	3,451	3,469	3,467	-18	-0.5	-4	-16	-0.50	1,405	0.60
Bannock	75,672	75,492	75,594	180	0.2	-606	78	0.10	40,187	2.70
Bear Lake	6,323	6,330	6,425	-7	-0.1	-39	-102	-1.60	2,706	0.80
Benewah	8,961	9,032	9,195	-71	-0.8	-51	-234	-2.50	3,658	10.00
Bingham	43,205	42,905	41,812	300	0.7	-166	1,393	3.30	18,463	5.40
Blaine	21,103	20,731	19,127	372	1.8	179	1,976	10.30	12,587	15.30
Boise	7,362	7,236	6,746	126	1.7	95	616	9.10	3,710	3.00
Bonner	39,872	39,197	37,026	675	1.7	632	2,846	7.70	21,806	17.20
Bonneville	89,653	87,237	82,899	2,416	2.8	1,483	6,754	8.10	42,882	11.60
Boundary	10,396	10,172	9,927	224	2.2	152	469	4.70	4,007	3.40
Butte	2,838	2,858	2,899	-20	-0.7	-21	-61	-2.10	1,062	-15.00
Camas	1,013	1,035	981	-22	-2.1	-17	32	3.30	545	13.30
Canyon	158,038	151,998	133,092	6,040	4	4,158	24,946	18.70	69,826	9.40
Caribou	7,213	7,194	7,309	19	0.3	-14	-96	-1.30	2,920	0.00
Cassia	21,393	21,537	21,412	-144	-0.7	-343	-19	-0.10	8,273	-2.00
Clark	906	909	1,027	-3	-0.3	-6	-121	-11.80	445	-6.50
Clearwater	8,393	8,448	8,895	-55	-0.7	-43	-502	-5.60	3,342	7.80
Custer	4,114	4,118	4,340	-4	-0.1	10	-226	-5.20	2,054	9.50
Elmore	28,878	28,742	29,088	136	0.5	-199	-210	-0.70	9,529	3.70
Franklin	12,199	11,898	11,364	301	2.5	202	835	7.30	5,656	17.90
Fremont	12,263	12,175	11,792	88	0.7	-26	471	4.00	5,349	4.10
Gem	15,963	15,783	15,218	180	1.1	160	745	4.90	6,538	-0.30
Gooding	14,346	14,329	14,201	17	0.1	-67	145	1.00	5,871	3.20
Idaho	15,616	15,490	15,473	126	0.8	142	143	0.90	6,364	8.70
Jefferson	20,782	20,225	19,227	557	2.8	320	1,555	8.10	9,353	11.60
Jerome	19,279	18,921	18,442	358	1.9	172	837	4.50	9,865	6.40
Kootenai	122,350	117,614	109,539	4,736	4	4,226	12,811	11.70	58,336	15.90
Latah	35,169	34,986	34,858	183	0.5	21	311	0.90	19,319	-0.40
Lemhi	7,820	7,755	7,745	65	0.8	84	75	1.00	3,586	11.60
Lewis	3,753	3,747	3,746	6	0.2	-9	7	0.20	1,637	9.10
Lincoln	4,326	4,302	4,057	24	0.6	-14	269	6.60	1,834	10.70
Madison	30,782	29,725	27,421	1,057	3.6	594	3,361	12.30	13,928	10.50
Minidoka	19,229	19,333	20,097	-104	-0.5	-233	-868	-4.30	7,729	-6.60
Nez Perce	37,823	37,701	37,387	122	0.3	171	436	1.20	18,862	-0.40
Oneida	4,143	4,129	4,129	14	0.3	19	14	0.30	1,795	5.50
Owyhee	10,998	11,102	10,692	-104	-0.9	-200	306	2.90	4,310	0.50
Payette	21,587	21,476	20,635	111	0.5	-35	952	4.60	9,371	1.90
Power	7,483	7,358	7,514	125	1.7	91	-31	-0.40	3,416	0.60
Shoshone	12,827	12,985	13,747	-158	-1.2	-116	-920	-6.70	6,579	-3.50
Teton	7,253	7,053	6,108	200	2.8	72	1,145	18.70	3,703	13.30
Twin Falls	67,935	67,055	64,348	880	1.3	565	3,587	5.60	36,932	8.20
Valley	7,970	7,762	7,642	208	2.7	189	328	4.30	4,213	6.20
Washington	10,059	10,008	9,975	51	0.5	22	84	0.80	4,072	-6.10

Sources: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau; Communications and Research, Idaho Commerce &amp; Labor